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CHARLES DE GAULLE AND THE BREAK WITH ATLANTICISM

Joseph F. Fil, Jr.
Lieutenant Colonel, US Army
Course 1 Seminar N
Colonel Drennan and Dr. O'Niell

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DE GAULLE THE STATESMAN

In breaking France from the allegiances of American-dominated NATO and moving her to a leadership role among the world's nations, Charles de Gaulle demonstrated the skills of a master statesman, capable of using all of the primary elements of national power to achieve his strategic objectives. This was de Gaulle at his finest able to define and support national interests while in possession of little apparent power, able to set goals and objectives and achieve them through an extraordinarily broad-reaching course of action

Under de Gaulle's stewardship, French security policy remained remarkably consistent. Although his diplomacy was exceedingly supple, he remained adamantly devoted to France's freedom, independence and security. Likewise, he was steadfast in his efforts to restructure European, Atlantic, and eventually even global politics to enhance France's position, while contributing to a more flexible and stable international system.

THE SETTING

Examining the setting as de Gaulle perceived it is particularly instructive because it provides a context for understanding his view of France's rightful place in the world, and his unwavering tenacity in moving her there.

Taking power in 1958, de Gaulle found France in a situation very different than it had been at the time of the NATO's creation at the end of World War II. He believed France was back on its feet, and no longer in a position of absolute reliance upon America and the uncertainties of its financial and military support. Viewing the bipolar military hegemony of the U.S. and the Soviets, it seemed to him unlikely that the Soviets would suddenly attack to conquer the West, but instead they were much more likely to

pursue a policy of detente. However, he also believed in the event of an outbreak of hostilities, neither the Soviets nor the Americans would be willing to risk waging nuclear war on each other's soil, for fear of retaliation, but might be very willing to fight on the traditional Western European battlefield that separated them. Finally, viewing the toll of two devastating wars on France's nationhood and personality, he believed that France's grandeur had eroded to common mediocrity, that France had given away its proper place as the world's preeminent national example of freedom, independence and enlightened leadership

DE GAULLE'S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

In Charles De Gaulle's view, France's national interests sprung from what he considered the very essence of her character and the basis of her self-esteem: independence and grandeur as a nation. He considered independence, France's ability to decide on her own what she must do and with whom, unfettered by the influence of any other state or collective body, a precondition for all other interests. This overarching consideration became inextricably linked to the restoration of France's grandeur, a fundamental aspect of her permanent national interest "encompassing not only the political, economic, and defense interests, or others, but also the image of France in the world and the principles of which she is the natural representative." De Gaulle believed France must secure the homage of the world, with her status as a great nation recognized and confirmed in the behavior of other nations. He believed a reputation of glory was in fact great power in itself, which could be wielded as a compensation for power in real terms. He believed French grandeur must be sought not only to unify the nation and give it a sense of purpose, but also because it was in the interest of all humanity. De Gaulle's grand, prestigious, independent France, defining the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, would serve as an inspiration for all nations. Following France's example, other countries

would aspire to emulate her in the more flexible, pluralistic international system which France would help foster.

From these interests evolved broad national goals, which remained remarkably consistent throughout de Gaulle's term:

INDEPENDENCE. De Gaulle sought sufficient leverage to permit France's leaders to manage and control the effects of international interdependence, and particularly to reduce the ability of other nations or organizations to make decisions affecting France without her free consent and participation. Specifically, this meant the disengagement of France, not from the Atlantic alliance, which needed to be maintained by way of ultimate precaution, but from NATO and its American command

LEADERSHIP. De Gaulle wanted a seat at the world's decision-making table, as an equal with both the Americans and the Soviets. France must have a relationship, and influence, with each of the world's states, and especially with Russia and the Eastern Block, China, and the Third World nations. This would provide a basis for bringing about not only a detente, but eventually understanding, negotiation and cooperation.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES. De Gaulle had three specific objectives which supported the broader national goals, upon which he would focus in nearly every dealing with other states: (1) **DISARMAMENT.** De Gaulle argued for nuclear disarmament, and in its absence, the controlled destruction of at least the launching vehicles. A realist, he also knew that none of the powers currently possessing nuclear weapons would be immediately willing to give theirs up so he continued his aggressive work to ensure France had her own *force de frappe* and maintained complete freedom of action in this matter. Independence and world leadership presupposed the possession of modern means of deterrence to ensure France's security, De Gaulle wanted nuclear capability

such that no one could consider attacking France without the frightful risk of serious damage. (2) WESTERN PRESENCE IN BERLIN. He vehemently supported the continued presence and support of the Western powers in the city of Berlin, as opposed to releasing it as a "free city", and therefore into Soviet domination and control. (3) ADVANCEMENT OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. He strongly argued the merits of the world's great powers supporting the development of Third World nations, not only for altruistic reasons, but for reasons of increased commerce and world stability. In de Gaulle's view, these objectives not only supported the national goals, but were tools to enhance her national interests.

INSTRUMENTS OF STATECRAFT

De Gaulle embarked immediately in pursuit of these goals and objectives, deftly using every instrument available. His statecraft, however, bore the mark of his own personality and historical experience. He believed "in foreign affairs, logic and sentiment do not weigh heavily in favor of the realities of power, that what matters is what one takes and what one can hold on to, that to regain her place, France must count only on herself." Thus, in his peculiar way, he often stressed conflict and confrontation rather than reconciliation and cooperation. More often than not, his tactics involved refusal, obstruction, intransigency, and manipulation of *faits accomplis* to guarantee France's interests.

DIPLOMACY. De Gaulle's diplomatic style, while both independent and intransigent, was nevertheless extremely effective and inevitably supported his objectives. He was honest and forthright, strongly laying out France's position and arguing its mutually beneficial merits. In his dealings with Eisenhower and Kennedy; Churchill, Macmillan, and Queen Elizabeth; Khrushchev, Adenauer; and every other head of state with whom he interacted, he was a master at setting the agenda, focusing the discussion in France's terms, and working every angle to support France's interrelated goals. Whether dealing

with other nations, whether powerful or developing, independently (as he did in his well-publicized visits abroad or in the highly opulent and ostentatious events and displays he provided for dignitaries during their visits to France), or collectively (as at the American-British-Soviet-French ["Big Four"] summit he hosted in 1960), de Gaulle invariably stressed the same themes and issues. He consistently portrayed France's grandeur and independence, unyieldingly maintained her interests, and stubbornly focused the discussions on his agenda (Disarmament, Berlin, and the Third World). To his great credit, he was very successful in continually reinforcing these themes while engaged in some of history's most contentious debates.

ECONOMIC. De Gaulle realized France's economic situation, although greatly improved since the war's end, was not sufficient to be wielded as an element of national power. He did, however, have a complete understanding of economics as an element of statecraft, and knew it could be used as a tool of great influence. In his discussions with Prime Minister Macmillan about the British move to join the European Common Market, a move with potentials for a "European Europe" that enthralled both Macmillan and de Gaulle, it was de Gaulle who clearly outlined the economic reasons which would make Britain never leave its own Commonwealth. He fully grasped, and explained, the broadest implications of such a move on current tariffs and quotas, and the entangled monetary considerations involved in the mortgages, debts and obligations which such internationalism would entail.

COMMUNICATIONS. De Gaulle was a superior communicator, who was able to use all of the tools available to shape national and world opinion in support of his objectives. In both his domestic communications and in his dealing with heads of state and the public abroad, he continually reinforced the themes of French grandeur, independence, and dominance as a world power. A brilliant and convincing speaker, he was able to unite an attractive and often logical view of the emerging international order with a pivotal role for France.

Recovering her own independence and universally admired, she seemed the natural champion of the international peace and equilibrium, and a perfect emissary for the needs of the developing Third World.

MILITARY. De Gaulle realized that one of his most powerful instruments of statecraft was the military. Believing that France's influence in non-security areas seemed potentially weaker than her influence over European regional defense, de Gaulle saw a modern national defense system as a strong compensating factor. Thus, a potent defense system would increase French status and prestige -- the other elements of power. They would also be a source of influence in the newly complex international system in which states are not only mutually dependent, but find that dominant influence in one area can be manipulated to compensate for relative weakness in another. De Gaulle knew that a strong, independent, nuclear-equipped military could minimize the costs of dependence across a spectrum of issues. Given de Gaulle's belief that "the principle that dominates everything is that an army fights for its country, under the authority of its government and under the order of its leaders," the move out of NATO was inevitable. That he was able to be so firmly against military integration, yet still maintain an alliance he valued in terms of its contribution to France's national goals -- as opposed to the beneficial effects on an ill-defined superior international community interest -- again illustrates de Gaulle's diplomatic style. Since France's participation in any alliance would exist primarily to serve France, de Gaulle knew that France could always wield great influence in any debate by resorting to her first weapon, intransigence, and failing that, she could in effect temporarily withdraw from the coalition in defense of her own interests.

A PARTIAL SUCCESS

Although de Gaulle's skills as a statesman were undeniably effective, the actual results he achieved were mixed. He was able to bring to France an image of grandeur and importance which not only surged national pride but gave her a place at the world's decision-making table. France's independence not only gave her power and influence with her allies, but gave her a link with the rest of the world unlike any other nation at the time. The high point of this unique autonomous diplomatic capability was perhaps in her collaboration with the Soviet Union during de Gaulle's tour there in 1966. Triumphantly heralded by the withdrawal from NATO that established France's credentials to carry on independent dialogues with any nation, de Gaulle was able to enhance a *detente* and act as an intermediary and impartial interlocutor. This was unquestionably a stabilizing influence. It also gave entry to a dialogue with, and on behalf of, the nations of the Third World -- which eventually developed into a network of relations and agreements placing France in a situation which further enhanced her influence and opened extensive new fields of economic and cultural activity.

The success was also limited though by the realities of France's capabilities. French resources were insufficient to carry off the ambitious role of interlocutor between East, West, and Third World. And although French independence was world-renown, in reality accommodation to an Atlantic status quo was eventually achieved, with France as a partial, but close, ally to NATO. Europe remained Atlanticist, and *detente* remained elusive, uncertain, and unlikely to have any immediate effect on international politics.

ANALYSIS OF CAUSES

The Gaullist position on national defense was naturally derived from the ideals of French independence, grandeur, and the preference for limited forms of international cooperation consistent with the overriding need to uphold the integrity of the French national state. De Gaulle's notions of France's

special mission in the world, her desire for independence and superior status, her right to a prominent international role, were in fact not at all extraordinary when held in light of the environment, beliefs and value systems of post World War France. These notions were shared by most of France's elite, even if not so eloquently stated. As Harrison points out in "Gaulist Perspectives in French Security," noncooperation and obstructionism as a pattern of behavior and a means of retaining privileged interests had been traditional practices in French politics and diplomacy. Individualism in the confrontation of a hostile environment is a long-standing characteristic of the French value system. In this sense, de Gaulle carried on a distinctly French pattern in his foreign policy behavior and, by force of his personality and conviction, was simply being very "French."

Thus, although de Gaulle's skill in forging and affecting national security policy marks him as one of the greatest statesmen of this century, his view of France's national interests, goals and objectives, and his techniques in employing the instruments of statecraft, were very much predictable -- and well-suited to the specific time and place. Expectations of flexibility and compromise would not be fulfilled by Gaulist France when basic issues of prestige and independence were thought to be at stake.

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